



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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Two Plants from Rota Listed as Endangered Species

Two plant species – *Nesogenes rotensis* and *Osmoxylon mariannense* – found only on the island of Rota in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands were designated as endangered species today. A third species, *Tabernaemontana rotensis*, was withdrawn from consideration for listing. This species occurs on Rota and in the Territory of Guam. A complete description of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's decision to extend Federal protection to these species was published in the Federal Register on April 8th.

“Imperiled plants often don’t receive the recognition they deserve,” said David B. Allen, Regional Director of the Service’s Pacific Region. “Plants are an integral part of a healthy environment. They provide cultural and economic benefits that range from ornamental and medicinal uses to shelter and food for native wildlife.”

Nesogenes rotensis is an herbaceous plant in the Verbena family with small, coarsely toothed leaves and small white flowers. *Osmoxylon mariannense* is a spindly, soft-wooded tree in the Ginseng family that can grow up to 33 feet.

These two plant species are threatened by habitat degradation and loss caused by development in forested areas. They also are imperiled because of encroachment of non-native plants that compete for space and nutrients. Grazing and trampling by feral pigs and deer, road construction and maintenance activities, recreational activities, alleged vandalism, reduced reproductive vigor due to extremely small population sizes, and probable seed predation by insects, mice or rats also threaten all three species. The small geographic areas that the plants occupy make them vulnerable to extinction from naturally occurring events such as typhoons.

Only 34 *Nesogenes rotensis* plants and eight *Osmoxylon mariannense* plants remain on Rota. Perhaps because they are so rare, neither plant has a common name.

Although *Tabernaemontana rotensis* is recognized as endemic on Guam and Rota, published work has identified it as part of the widespread species *Tabernaemontana pandacaqui*. The Service

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originally proposed listing *Tabernaemontana rotensis* with the other two species, but in developing the final rule has reconsidered its status.

Because there is no indication that *Tabernaemontana pandacqui* is endangered or threatened throughout all or a significant portion of its range, and because *Tabernaemontana rotensis* does not appear to be a separate species, the Service does not believe there is a basis for listing at this time.

However, the Service believes that it is perfectly appropriate for local authorities to conserve this plant. If further information supports the argument that *Tabernaemontana rotensis* is a species endemic to Guam and Rota, the Service will reconsider the need to list it.

Now that *Nesogenes rotensis* and *Osmoxylon mariannense* are protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act, a recovery plan will be developed that identifies steps to overcome threats to them. Recovery strategies may also include monitoring existing populations and increasing the number of individuals and populations through propagation programs. The goal of the Endangered Species Act is to improve the status of the two species so they may eventually be removed from Federal protection.

Under the Endangered Species Act, it is unlawful to remove any listed plants from Federal lands. On non-Federal lands it is illegal to damage, destroy or remove plants in knowing violation of state laws. Federal agencies must consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service when they carry out, fund, or permit activities that may affect a Federally listed plant.

Native plants are important for their ecological, economic, and aesthetic values. Plants play an important role in development of crops that resist disease, insects, and drought. At least 25 percent of prescription drugs contain ingredients derived from plant compounds, including medicine to treat cancer, heart disease, juvenile leukemia, and malaria, and to assist in organ transplants. Plants are also used to develop natural pesticides.

On June 1, 2000 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published its proposal to list these three plant species. On Aug. 21, 2002, U.S. District Court for Hawaii ordered the Service to submit to the *Federal Register* a final listing decision for these three plants no later than April 1, 2004.

Copies of the final rule may be downloaded from the Service's website at <http://pacificislands.fws.gov>. Copies are also available by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service office in Honolulu at 808 792 9400.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.